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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [MCAP](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: IDF REGIONAL COMMANDERS SPEAK OUT IN PRESS
INTERVIEWS

Classified By: DCM Luis G. Moreno, Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

11. (S) Summary and Comment: Within the span of several days, the Israeli Defense Force Regional Commanders made direct and frank comments in separate interviews to the press regarding the state-of-play in Israel's northern, central, and southern regions. On the northern border, Maj. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot described a GOI policy to respond with indiscriminate force against Lebanon should hostilities resume. OC Central Command Maj. Gen. Gadi Shamni highlighted increased settler violence and improved Palestinian Authority security forces in the West Bank. In the south, Maj. Gen. Yoav Galant suggested Israel could retake the Gaza Strip at any time -- but with a heavy price. All three regional commanders argued the Second Lebanon War represented a "missed opportunity." We believe the release of the three interviews is a coordinated effort by the IDF to reassure the Israeli public and make clear its views during a period in which the GOI is focused on coalition politics. Conspicuous by its absence is any discussion of military operations against Iran, the planning for which is being conducted by Air Force Commander Maj. Gen. Ido Nehushtan. End summary and comment.

Northern Command: "Dahiya Doctrine"

12. (SBU) In his first interview in four years, OC Northern Command Maj. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot described a tense situation along the northern Israeli border -- and suggested a crushing Israeli response should fighting resume. Eisenkot -- perceived by some as a candidate for chief of staff -- is charged with preventing another "fiasco" following the Second Lebanon War of 2006. He argued that the Second Lebanon War was allowed to continue for too long; the next war -- if it breaks out -- "should be decided quickly and powerfully, without winking to world public opinion." Eisenkot made these comments to the Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth on Oct. 3.

13. (SBU) Eisenkot said the probability of another round of fighting in Lebanon is high, noting the Lebanese side of the border has changed. He described the 160 Shiite villages south of the Litani River as "surface-to-surface rocket villages" -- each Shiite village is run by Hizballah as a military site with a headquarters, an intelligence center, and a communications center. Eisenkot said dozens of rockets are concealed in village homes, basements and attics, suggesting Hizballah is preparing for a defensive battle in addition to the capability of firing rockets at Israel.

14. (SBU) Eisenkot said these villages are backed by Iran,

which is investing "hundreds of millions of dollars" there per year -- including equipment, training, and direct command. Eisenkot said Israeli forces have observed Iranian personnel "in the field, approving operational plans." He added that Israeli intelligence coverage is more significant and serious -- improved intelligence was one of the most important lessons learned from 2006.

15. (SBU) Commenting on the Iran-Syria-Hizballah axis, Eisenkot suggested Syria has "the best of both worlds": it has repaired its international image, but continues to permit Hizballah to build its strength. He argued that there is a "Hizballah-ization" of the Syrian army, which is adopting tactics learned in 2006. Eisenkot said Syrian armed forces are increasing stocks of anti-tank rockets and anti-aircraft missiles, thereby enhancing fortifications and defense capabilities.

16. (S) Eisenkot labeled any Israeli response to resumed conflict the "Dahiya doctrine" in reference to the leveled Dahiya quarter in Beirut during the Second Lebanon War in 2006. He said Israel will use disproportionate force upon any village that fires upon Israel, "causing great damage and destruction." Eisenkot made very clear: this is not a recommendation, but an already approved plan -- from the Israeli perspective, these are "not civilian villages, they are military bases." Eisenkot in this statement echoed earlier private statements made by IDF Chief of General Staff Gabi Ashkenazi, who said the next fight in Southern Lebanon would come at a much higher cost for both sides -- and that the IDF would not hold back.

17. (SBU) Eisenkot stated that Damascus fully understands what the Israelis did in Dahiya, and that the Israelis have the capability of doing the same to Syria. He suggested the possibility of harm to the population has been Hizballah leader Nasrallah's main constraint, and the reason for the quiet over the past two years. Eisenkot criticized media coverage of Nasrallah, arguing it legitimizes and equalizes Nasrallah as an adversary.

Central Command: Leaving the Territories a "Very Big Risk"

18. (SBU) In a separate interview with Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz on Oct. 3, OC Central Command Maj. Gen. Gadi Shamni reviewed on-going friction in the West Bank, especially following the recent stabbing at Yitzhar, the settler rampage in the nearby Palestinian village of Asira al-Kabiliya, clashes in Hebron and near the Yad Yair outpost, and a Palestinian driver plowing into pedestrians in Jerusalem. Shamni, which Ha'aretz suggests as a possible next chief of Military Intelligence, praised Palestinian security forces' efforts in the West Bank. However, he was quick to note that it will take time for the Palestinian Authority to establish its counterterrorism capacity.

19. (SBU) Shamni describes "an increase in Jewish violence" in the West Bank; several hundred people are conspiring against Palestinians and security forces, he said. Settlers organized a demonstration outside his home last month protesting restraining orders he issued against three right-wing activists. Shamni argues such actions cause "tremendous damage" to the Israel Defense Force's image and the State of Israel, and force the IDF to divert its attention elsewhere, thereby impairing its ability to carry out missions in the territories. Shamni notes the Israeli security service Shin Bet is well-aware of these individuals and the danger they bring, but also acknowledges that "an extreme incident could happen at any time."

110. (SBU) Shamni praised efforts by the Palestinian security services, including especially the Jenin Project. According to the Ha'aretz article, Shamni said United States Security Coordinator (USSC) Gen. Dayton told him in late July that the project had not succeeded as the economy had not improved dramatically. Shamni disagreed, stating that the project has created a "good basis" in Jenin, and noted improvements such

as working groups, public-works projects, and a hotline between Israeli and Palestinian forces, and that rather than terminate it, Shamni pressed for what the IDF is calling "Jenin 2." Shamni lamented lack of high-quality troops in the Palestinian security forces, and the length of training for these forces in Jordan.

¶11. (SBU) The Palestinian Authority (PA) has become stronger, Shamni acknowledged. Yet Shamni argued that Hamas has the capability of recovering quickly -- this requires continued pressure by both the Israelis and the PA. While the PA has been effective, it has only just begun to build an alternative to what "Hamas has been doing for years," he said. Proper PA rule will take time; Israeli withdrawal from the territories will be a "very big risk," Shamni argued. In that respect, work on the separation fence has been moving too slowly; Shamni doubted the fence could be completed within three years time.

¶12. (SBU) Shamni offered his own limited thoughts on the Second Lebanon War, describing it as a "missed opportunity." He argued that the IDF had the capability and sufficiently trained units to "do a much better job" than the outcome in 2006. Shamni suggests that the IDF "knowingly skimmed on training," which contributed to its mediocre performance -- but the "qualitative and quantitative difference" between the IDF and Hizballah should have translated into a "much better ground operation." He opined that the soldiers or lower-level commanders were not at fault; rather, the poor outcome was a result of "the way things were conducted at higher levels."

Southern Command: Use Our Head, Not Our Gut

¶13. (C) In his Sept. 29 interview with the Israeli newspaper Ma'ariv, OC Southern Command Maj. Gen. Yoav Galant analyzed the Israeli decision to disengage and the subsequent security

ramifications in the Gaza Strip. Galant is mentioned in some circles as the next deputy chief of staff. Although beginning poorly, Galant's relationship with Ashkenazi has gradually improved.

¶14. (SBU) Galant explained that disengagement from the Gaza Strip was a "political act." Defending the border with Gaza has become much easier, but has led to a strengthened Hamas. Galant said Hamas now has anti-tank rockets and anti-aircraft missiles in Gaza; it is only a matter of time before they acquire planes and tanks. He estimated Hamas numbers "in the range of 20,000" fighters, and is organized with a military commander, and chain of command complete with regional commanders, sub-regional headquarters, battalions, companies and smaller units. According to Galant, Hamas is developing a "doctrine of warfare" -- an important difference between a terror organization that acts randomly and a military guerrilla organization capable of learning lessons and instilling doctrine.

¶15. (SBU) Nevertheless, Galant argued that the balance of power remains in Israel's favor -- Hamas is "still a thousandth of Israel's military might." As such, he suggests the IDF can do "almost anything it feels like in the Gaza Strip" -- but at a price. He cautioned that Israel should "use our head and not our gut" -- and deflected questions of pre-emptive strikes to higher political levels. Hamas recognizes Israel's overwhelming military superiority, Galant argued, which is why Hamas military targets are always located near schools or residential buildings. Hamas' goal is not to defeat the Israeli military, but rather to exact a "moral and international price" and to "enlist Israeli public opinion" to make the price of conflict with Hamas intolerable.

¶16. (SBU) On smuggling along the Egyptian border, Galant noted that the "Egyptians are trying." While its performance has improved, he argued that Egypt could do more by preventing the smuggling of weapons into the Sinai, instead of focusing only upon the border with Gaza. Galant accused Iran as being responsible for the arms entering Gaza,

including missile prototypes meant for learning on, disassembling, and self-production.

¶17. (SBU) Finally, Galant concurred that the Second Lebanon War represented a missed opportunity to "create an achievement on a significantly large scale." He suggested that the "highest levels" of the GOI did not understand how to employ the Israeli military, nor the actions necessary to achieve stated goals.

COMMENT

¶18. (S) The timing of the interviews suggests a well-coordinated attempt by the IDF and Gen. Ashkenazi to

make their views known to the Israeli public as the GOI civilian leadership struggles with coalition politics. When Ashkenazi assumed command of the IDF, he imposed a near media blackout for his general officers, and has subsequently limited their contact with the media. Rumors in the IDF claim that any leaks will be dealt with severely, and IDF officers have been polygraphed to insure compliance with this policy.

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